

## Postcolonial Queer Europe in a Time of Growing Nationalism and Racism

**THE AMOUNT OF** rainbow flags greeting me and my girlfriend as we got off the train in Gothenburg during the June 2017 edition of Sweden's "West Pride" was astonishing, too many to count. The whole city, it seemed, was embracing LGBTQ rights, liberation even, and everyone wanted to join the party. As is often the case during Pride, straight people were smiling at us. As if this weekend we existed, were even seen and tolerated, as a "interracial" lesbian couple. We were not there to attend Pride in the center of the city, but to meet with anti-racist academics.

Later we learned that black queers from Stockholm and Gothenburg regions were not attending Pride either. Rather, they gathered further out West, in the suburb of Angered, to talk about issues that are familiar to queer youths of color in many, many European cities: racism, economic and cultural marginalization, and the effects of hegemonic whiteness. Activist friends later told us that queer youths of color would never consider going into town to the Pride area. They do not feel welcome, or safe, the city is not theirs. Instead, they gather in their own neighborhood, where they study queer of color history, and create local support networks and talk about the oppression they face

within the movement and in society as a whole. Who, we might ask, is Pride for?

Fast forward to August and Stockholm Pride. There is hardly a restaurant or business in the city center that is not taking advantage of one of the largest festivals of the year. Every bus is decorated with rainbow flags and the financial outcomes for the city hosting the biggest Pride in the Nordic region is estimated to far exceed the 230 million SEK in revenue reported in 2013 (Jerdén 2017). Debates about who is included and invited, how much it costs to attend, and what the state of the movement is abound, as they always do. In recent years, the content of the program has become heavily dominated by presentations by governmental bodies and state authorities, businesses, political parties, and organizations. Despite the fact that questions of racism, asylum and difference are increasingly central to the LGBTQ movement, the official program this year only lists a handful of panels centered on these or on experiences of queers of color over the course of the festival's five days.

As the parade's estimated 45,000 participants moves through the posh areas of downtown Stockholm, a group of neo-nazis called Nordisk Ungdom [Nordic Youth], attack the parade, as they have several times before. Less than a week later, the same group attacks a peaceful sit-in by hundreds of lone-arriving Afghan refugee youth who are facing deportation to a country that the Swedish government has deemed too unsafe to visit. Indeed, in the moment of writing this, right-wing, fascist, and even neo-Nazi movements are growing in Sweden; they interrupt peaceful demonstrations, are welcome at the national Book Fair in Gothenburg, they disturb the national gathering of politicians in Almedalen, and they stalk and harass people on line and on the streets. Thousands of academics working on issues of racism, postcolonialism, discrimination, LGBTQ issues, and even mainstream feminism are listed on websites as "enemies." It is not an exaggeration to say that extreme right-wing violence is becoming increasingly visible, normalized even. Yet, far too often the concerns of those directly affected are dismissed under the rubric of defending "freedom of speech." While thoroughly homophobic, these racist attacks leave some (queer) bodies more vulnerable and affected than others.

Meanwhile, outside the Nordic region, the role of gay subjects in relation to the (European) nation remains contradictory. On the one hand, we hear horrifying reports of more than 100 presumed to be gay men being rounded up, abducted and brought to concentration camp like facilities in the semi-autonomous Russian federation republic of Chechnya. As late as in July, we received reports of the continued persecution, while state officials claim that there are no gay people in the country, and if there are, they need to be purged in order to “purify the blood” of Chechnya. On the other hand, openly gay men now sit next to the leaders of many growing fascist and nationalist parties in countries such as France and the Netherlands (Sörberg 2017; see also Bacchetta in this issue), frequently casting white gays as subjects particularly vulnerable to an imagined “Muslim threat.” The reality, it seems, is that while the 2000s has brought a whole range of new rights and laws protecting LGBTQ subjects in some European nations, those very rights are not only not extended to everyone, but these hard-won rights are also used by homonationalists and racists to oppose asylum for refugees, to attack Muslims, and to define national values. Rather than interrogating the effects of colonialism and imperialism and how these are entangled with particular ideas of “proper” gender and sexualities, large numbers of Western gays are mobilized largely around how to “save” migrant LGBTQ youth from their presumed “honor cultures.” How are we, as scholars and activists to understand, respond, and act in an increasingly violent, tumultuous Europe and Nordic region where issues of sexuality and gender, colonialism, race and migration are articulated in a range of contradictory and for many queer and trans people of color deeply oppressive and dangerous ways?

This special issue of *lambda nordica* will not provide answers to such questions *per se*, but it does offer new critical perspectives and contributes to a growing body of scholarship concerned with some of the most urgent questions facing LGBTQ studies at this moment. The result of a call for papers that generated sixteen abstracts from all over Europe and beyond, the issue has been long in the making and has generated its own set of discussions among editors, reviewers, and authors: What does it

mean to do anti-racist scholarship? What is a postcolonial analysis? For whom do we write and how can we use the terms that are now being introduced and developed? These are discussions that we must keep on having.

The interest in this issue is promising insofar as it suggests that there is a growing body of scholarship focused on denaturalizing *whiteness* as a marker of Europeanness and on how LGBTQ issues articulate with questions of nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism. As Europe faces the effects of its own colonial histories, its imperialist wars, and continues to guard its own borders, the questions of who belongs in Europe, why and how are gaining new urgency. Indeed, our focus in this issue is broader than the Nordic region – we do not have any articles here concerned with “our” region as such – but clearly, these issues are deeply *European* in both their colonialist and imperialist historical roots and their current manifestations. We need these perspectives if we are to understand the growing nationalist, fascist, and even Nazi formations across Europe and how these both become threats to LGBTQ issues and use some of “us” to further their own racist agendas. How do we understand the role of gay men within right-wing politics? How are we to think critically about colonialist and Eurocentric ideas of what it means to be non-heterosexual and non-binary gender conforming and the effect of such ideas in international politics, including development aid from European nations? What counts as queer in art, performance, and literature by queers of color and what can be learned from queers of color organizing in white dominated spaces? Judging by the interest in the topic, especially from junior scholars with ongoing dissertation projects, we can expect this to be the first of many issues, which will address these questions.

### **This Issue**

With this double special issue, we are delighted to present six strong papers that engage a range of different topics within a broader field of postcolonial queer studies, critical race theory and queer of color critique in Europe. Rather than offering a lengthy editorial introduction to the emerging fields of postcolonial, decolonial, anti-racist and queer

of color scholarship, we invite readers to consider this issue as a whole as a form of introduction to these issues and the burgeoning literature.

We open with gender studies scholar Alyosxa Tudor's article, "Queering Migration Discourse: Differentiating Racism and Migratism in Postcolonial Europe," in which the argument is made for a differentiation of racism and, what the author calls, *migratism* within the fields of critical (queer and trans) feminist knowledge production; especially those committed to studying racism and migration in postcolonial Europe. In this epistemological project, Tudor contends that without this differentiation, theory, and activism around questions of migration run the risk of reproducing an idea of Europe as a space free of race (and thus where racism and racialization is often denied). Tudor's careful discussion does not aim to distinguish struggles against racism from those against migratism, and acknowledges that racism and migratism have a specific interconnection. Instead, and assuming that anti-racist and anti-migratist struggles have a long and shared history, Tudor underlines the importance of close analysis of the construction of gendered racialization in Europe and its relationship to migration. In addition, Tudor shows how without a more nuanced discussion transnationalism remains a reductive collection of assumed homogenous nations and Europeans of color as subject in discussions of racism and migration. We find this discussion particularly helpful for projects that aim to consider how race and racialization shapes ideas of belonging in different European settings.

Christine Klapeer's article, "Queering Development in Homotransnationalist Times: A Postcolonial Reading of LGBTIQ Inclusive Development Agendas," discusses the "development industry's" growing attention to LGBTIQ rights and focuses on the strong role that European LGBTIQ organizations and LGBTIQ identified development practitioners play in aiming to queer development cooperation and development policies. Klapeer draws on postcolonial and radical development studies and queer discussions on imperial and neocolonial implications of transnational LGBTIQ politics to discuss how "queer agendas" become particularly entangled with the racialized manifestations of the project of development. Attending to the wider political context of queer

development agendas, the article studies how new versions of, what Klapeer calls, a European sexual exceptionalism are promoted and these interact with homotransnationalist policies and LGBTIQ development strategies. It shows how LGBTIQ inclusive development strategies not only risk participating in the production of a temporal-spatial divide between a “sexually developed” Europe/West, cast with an imagined “burden” to “develop” and “modernize” the sexually “backward” and “homophobic” rest, and equally importantly, how “queer” desires for development are often shaped by, what Klapeer calls, “homonostalgic” postures and narratives. Ending on a more hopeful note, the article also sheds light on how (LGBTIQ inclusive) development agendas can also be decolonial and counter-hegemonic. This piece, we think, help us critically analyze what is at stake in various gay imperialist projects that could be called “white queers saving brown queers from brown homophobic” that have been eloquently analyzed by, among others, Jasbir Puar (2007), Jin Haritaworn et al. (2008), and Sarah Bracke (2012).

In “Properly Gay? The Construction of Ethnosexual Subjectivity in Sexual Counter-Narratives of Civil Society Agents,” Nella van den Brandt and Rahil Roodsaz tackle the crucial question of how to claim and articulate difference in discussions about sexuality that frequently tend to be normative in their understandings of sexuality. They build on research with civil society actors working on diversity in the Netherlands and Flanders and focus on counter-narratives to the dominant framework of “proper gayness” that assumes a self-centred coming-out logic that is devoid of racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. Van den Brandt and Roodsaz, themselves involved in queer anti-racist critique, coin the term *ethnosexual subjectivity* in order to analyze the critical, creative, and affirmative accounts of queerness of their interviewees. These actors, they contend, use a process of dis-identification in order to fight othering and stigmatization and to produce a different kind of knowledge about sexual diversity that insists on a multiplicity of possible identifications. This article helps us think about some of the effects of a white European centered understanding of LGBTQ identity and what it does for any kind of “unified” agenda.

Tamar Shirinian's article, "Sovereignty As a Structure of Feeling: The Homosexual within Post-Cold War Armenian Geopolitics," discusses how after a homosexual panic in Armenia in 2012, questions of Armenian nationhood and the geopolitical impacts of Russia to the East and Europe to the West became central for grassroots actors in post-Soviet Armenia. Grounded in ethnographic research with leftist activists and right-wing nationalists in Yerevan, Armenia, Shirinian's article seeks to expand on the impacts of Russia and especially "Eurasianism" on feelings of sovereignty within the post-socialist context. Drawing on Raymond Williams' (1977) notion of "structures of feeling," the article argues that in the post-Cold War era, conspiracy theories regarding figures like the homosexual and its threats on "cultural values," becomes the site where sovereignty is felt, negotiated, and contested. This article moves the queer discussion of post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe beyond a focus on EU and neighborhood membership as it impacts LGBT life, activism and nationalist contestation, and proposes that understandings of sovereignty emerge in the absence of official or transparent state positions, which has new implications on postcoloniality. Shirinian thus continues in the important paths of scholars such as Madina Tlostanova (2012), Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska (2011) and might perhaps also help us grasp some of the underlying factors contributing to the horrifying situation in Chechnya and Russia.

Lastly, Leyla Zami's creative and imaginative article, "Dancing the Past in the Present Tense: Queer Afropean Presence in Oxana Chi's Dancescapes," explores the subject of queer people of color's bodily presence on stage as an enactment of resistance to their widespread marginalization in hegemonic European timespaces. Zami's paper specifically discusses the work and techniques of queer Afropean choreographer Oxana Chi, and examines how three of Chi's solos reflect "a presence that is history, a history that is present" (Tinsley 2008, 195). Zami argues that Oxana Chi's dance speaks to gaps in European historiography and transforms the dancing body into a space of resistance.

Following this impressive set of original peer-reviewed articles, we are proud to present postcolonial feminist scholar Paola Bacchetta's con-

tribution to *We're Here*, which she offers in the form of the moving piece, “Murderous Conditions and LTQ+ POC Decolonial, Anti-Capitalist and Anti-Misogyny *Life* Imaginings in France.” The essay paints a bleak and yet hopeful picture; building on voices rarely heard, on the radical and brave critical and life affirming approaches and practices by lesbian, queer, and trans people of color in France and Europe, Bacchetta speaks to the deadly conditions and effects of colonialism, including segregation, police brutality, homonationalism, and islamophobia on marginalized communities and subjects. In a Nordic setting, where the past couple of decades have been characterized more by efforts to work with and in the state than against it, and where various authorities’ desire to march in Pride parades and engage in politics of LGBTQ “inclusivity,” have been relatively unquestioned, Bacchetta also reminds us that there are reasons to remain critical and ask what is at stake, for whom and how.

We end the issue with a statement on behalf of Black Queers Sweden written by founding members Samuel Girma and Juliet Atto. We do this to point to not only the urgency of the racism facing black people in Sweden but to point to growing activism more “locally” in the region. This is important because while extreme violence is escalating in our midst, we also know that decolonial and anti-racist movements are continuing and growing, from Sápmi to Greenland, Southern Denmark to Iceland. Indeed, in Sweden, recent years have witnessed the growth of what we might call a Black civil rights movement. Not only are a range of authors and artists, including Seinabo Sey and Jason Diakrité drawing attention to the conditions for black people in the Nordic region, organizations and activists are coming together and raising their voices, linking with transnational Black Lives Matter movements, with Black feminism, Black Hijabis, and with queer and trans people of color activism around Europe and beyond. On that note, we are incredibly grateful to Gothenburg-based photographer Alazar Keiredin for providing us with the powerful cover image for this issue from a recent protest in Stockholm. Over the past years, Keiredin has been following and documenting protests and rallies in Sweden, particularly the Black



Lives Matter movement and he is working toward a future exhibition on black beauty and activism.

Needless to say, the issues addressed here are not new, nor is there a shortage of scholarship on the matter. There is by now an extensive and growing literature on the effects of colonialism in the Nordic present, as well as a tradition of critically engaging with Nordic colonialist practices both within and beyond the region. We therefore regret that the issue does not feature scholarly work concerned with the Nordic region, but hope that this is only the first of many issues addressing these questions. To that end, we would especially like to invite scholars in the Nordic region to further this line of discussion in *lambda nordica*. As always, we also feature reviews in this issue, including one of Anna-Maria Sörberg's (2017) important and groundbreaking work on homonationalism in Sweden and beyond. We think that this double special issue will be useful to students, scholars, and activists who want to get a sense of some of the current political and intellectual concerns with regards to issues of race and racism, migration, postcoloniality, and ongoing colonialist knowledge practices in Europe and beyond.

Lastly, and on other matters of the journal, we are pleased to say that in May this year we had our first founding meeting at Uppsala University with the new Nordic board of associate editors. As we have previously announced, we have asked six leading scholars based in the Nordic region, Erika Alm, Elisabeth L. Engebretsen, Kaisa Ilmonen, Anu Koivunen, Michael Nebeling Petersen, and Jens Rydström, to join us as senior editors in shaping the direction of the journal's future and we are very pleased that all have joined us. We spent the day discussing both strengths and potential areas of further development and all agreed that the journal is an important site for scholarly exchange and for promoting LGBTQ scholarship from and within the Nordic region and beyond. The day, which was co-sponsored by Uppsala Forum at Uppsala University, was concluded with a public lecture by professor Jack Halberstam from Columbia University, who is also one of our international advisory board members.

In closing, let us return to the image of hundreds of young Afghan

refugees peacefully sitting outside the Swedish parliament in August being attacked by a group of people calling themselves Nordic Youth. Let us sit with what travels under the term “Nordic” these days. Let us sit with the terror of being a young, queer person, a young person of color, growing up in a region where an alarmingly growing number of whites believe themselves to be the rightful and sole “owners” of these lands. Let us consider the daily and ongoing physical and symbolic violence and brutality by police and security guards against queers of color. Let us also consider our LGBTQ histories of struggle and violence and what they have taught us. Is what “we” need at this point a continued expansion of access to a privileged (white) life of being recognized as consumer-citizens at rainbow flag waving restaurants and shops, complete with rights to reproduction and late-modern lifestyles? Could the LGBTQ movement, with our long and diverse histories of multi-issue activism, protest, and defiance have something else to offer and what can critical queer *and* anti-racist scholars contribute here? For us as a journal and community it remains a serious issue to question in whose name homonationalist agendas are being forged and whose (queer) lives are expendable in the name of “progress.”

Indeed, we are painfully aware of how Paola Bacchetta’s analysis of loss and livability hits home in many locations at this time. The loss of refugee lives along the southern borders and shores of Europe. The undocumented number of suicides among those awaiting asylum. The ongoing violence in the streets, the loss of queer and trans lives of color. Whose lives matter, whose lives are livable in Europe right now? Just before summer, we received the sad news of Estonian queer feminist artist Anna-Stina Treumund’s premature passing. Treumund was a leading queer artist and activist in Estonia and her art was featured on the cover of *lambda nordica*’s issue “In Transition” on Eastern and Central European sexualities (4/2012; see also Koobak 2013). In recent years, Treumund’s work had also explored the place of LGBTQ issues within the nation and with critiques of the growing nationalism and fascism in Estonia. As an activist, artist, and person, she will be sorely missed.

We would like to dedicate this issue to Anna-Stina and to all the brave activists and scholars who are facing and fighting racism, fascism, and right-wing nationalism every day, in Europe and elsewhere. Your lives matter, you will be remembered.

**ULRIKA DAHL**  
**SENIOR EDITOR**

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